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Atari Online News, Etc.
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-* Insiders Suspected in Saudi Attack! *-
-* Huawei Calls for Cybersecurity Cooperation *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

Parents are rejoicing nationwide - the kids are back in school. While the kids' summer vacation is over, the time for parents has arrived. It's hilarious to hear some parents talk about how they feel now that their kids are back to school! How about you?!

The presidential conventions are over, thankfully. I briefly watched a few segments of each of them, and wasn't impressed. All they come across as are super-sized pep rallies that are "preaching to the choir" and hoping to attract a large number of swing votes. Did you watch them? Were you swayed one way or another? And the negative ad campaigns are back into full swing. No surprises there; it's politics as usual. A few more months and it will all be over.

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 'Darksiders II' Tops Video Game Titles!
"~~~~~" Wikipad Gaming Tablet Arrives!
Activision Financials Drop!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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'Darksiders II' Tops Video Game Titles in August

U.S. retail sales of new video game hardware, software and accessories fell for the ninth straight month in August, according to research firm NPD Group.

Overall sales fell 20 percent to \$515.6 million.

Software sales the video games themselves excluding PC titles fell 9 percent from a year earlier to \$237.7 million. Sales of hardware such as Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360 and Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 3 fell 39 percent to \$150.6 million. Accessories slid 7 percent to \$127.3 million.

The study from NPD Group tracks sales of new physical products about 50 percent of the total spending. Excluded are sales of used games and rentals as well as digital and social-network spending. The research firm estimates that when including these, Americans spent \$989 million on games in August.

Despite the sharp decline, analyst Todd Mitchell called August's results a "potential bright spot" for video game software. The analyst with Brean Murray Carret noted that it was hardware that dragged on the month, while software sales dipped just 9 percent. New titles, he said, helped boost the year-long video game slump and teased a "possible inflection point."

"A number of blockbusters are expected to be released in September, which could boost software sales into positive territory for the first time in 2012," he added.

NPD also listed the top-selling games in August:

1. "Darksiders II" (THQ Inc)
2. "New Super Mario Bros 2" (Nintendo Co.)
3. "Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance" (Square Enix Inc.)
4. "NCAA Football 13" (Electronic Arts Inc.)
5. "Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes" (Time Warner Inc.'s Warner Bros. Interactive)
6. "Sleeping Dogs" (Square Enix Inc.)
7. "Transformers: Fall of Cybertron" (Activision Blizzard Inc.)
8. "Batman: Arkham City" (Warner Bros. Interactive)
9. "Call of Duty: Black Ops" (Activision Blizzard)
10. "The Amazing Spider-Man" (Activision Blizzard)

Wikipad Gaming Tablet Arrives at GameStop on October 31st for \$499

People who enjoy gaming on tablets but hate not having any analog sticks or physical buttons are in for a treat. GameStop (GME) announced on Friday its plans to release the Wikipad, a tablet that comes with an attachable console-quality gamepad controller. The Wikipad will be sold at GameStop starting on October 31st for \$499 and comes with a 10.1-inch IPS display, NVIDIA Tegra 3 quad-core processor, expandable memory card slot and support for games through Sony's (SNE) PlayStation Mobile platform as well as games streamed through Gaikai. Wikipad's included

controller attachment adds two analog sticks, a D-pad, four front action buttons, and a both shoulder buttons and triggers to simulate console gaming. The full Wikipad press release follows below.

WIKIPAD COMING TO GAMESTOP OCTOBER 31, 2012

GameStop Launches Pre-Order Program with Exclusive Content

LOS ANGELES, SEPTEMBER 7, 2012-GameStop, the world s largest multichannel retailer of video games, has partnered with Wikipad, Inc. to offer the Wikipad tablet, the first tablet with an attachable console-quality gamepad controller, through its stores and website. The Wikipad will be available October 31 to consumers at a retailer price of \$499 USD.

GameStop is the retail destination when it comes to video games. Nobody but GameStop provides gamers with the best gaming content on the market. And for those that purchase or pre-order a Wikipad at GameStop, their tablet will have access to valuable extras including exclusive free, full-length game titles. The Wikipad is powered by an Nvidia Tegra 3 processor and will support PlayStationMobile platform, said Fraser Townley, President of Sales for Wikipad, Inc.

Customers can pre-order the Wikipad now at GameStop stores nationwide or online at www.GameStop.com. Wikipads pre-ordered at GameStop will come with value-added extras including full-length titles and an issue of Game Informer Digital.

We are thrilled to be partnering with Wikipad to launch this unique new gaming tablet, said Joe Gorman, vice president of GameStop s mobile business unit. We love the innovation and know our customers are excited to see it in action.

Wikipad will launch in October with a full suite of games delivered by the latest video game platforms, including PlayStationMobile, NVIDIA s Tegra Zone, Google Play as well as several upcoming unannounced platforms. To bring the best gaming experience to consumers, Wikipad will offer a premium 10.1? IPS screen, ultra-light chassis, quad core processor, expandable memory and an attachable console quality game controller.

For more information on the Wikipad tablet, visit: www.wikipad.com.

Activision Financials Drop as Call of Duty and World of Warcraft Revenue Decline
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Thanks to the decline in World of Warcraft subscribers and the dipping sales of Call of Duty, Activision Blizzard s mid-year revenue saw a decline.

Fortunately for the company however, both Skylanders and Diablo III rose the to occasion, making up some of the ground lost by the dwindling sales of the publisher s two biggest franchises.

According to GamesIndustry, the revenue of Activision Blizzard for the first half of 2012 dropped to approximately \$2.17 billion, which makes for a 6.8% decline. However, the company s quarterly sales saw an increase on the order of \$51.5 million, yielding earnings that clock in at around

\$1.1 billion.

Profits will undoubtedly soar for the company this holiday season with the release of Black Ops 2, but it remains to be seen how well this Call of Duty shooter will do in comparison to the prior installments of years past. Has the franchise peaked or is there still some growing left for Activision's prized FPS franchise? Let us know in the comments below.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Huawei Calls for Cybersecurity Cooperation

Chinese telecoms equipment maker Huawei Technologies Ltd. has issued a report on cybersecurity that includes a pledge never to cooperate with spying in a fresh effort to allay concerns in the United States and elsewhere that threaten to hamper its expansion.

The report, written by a Huawei executive who is a former British official, calls for global efforts to create legal and technical security standards. It makes no recommendations for what standards to adopt but says current laws are inconsistent or fail to address important threats.

Huawei, founded by a former Chinese military engineer in 1987, has grown to become the world's second-largest supplier of telecoms network gear after Sweden's LM Ericsson. Suspicions that Huawei might be controlled by China's Communist Party or military have slowed its expansion in the United States and it was barred from bidding to take part in an Australian broadband project.

The company denies it is a security threat.

"We have never damaged any nation or had the intent to steal any national intelligence, enterprise secrets or breach personal privacy and we will never support or tolerate such activities, nor will we support any entity from any country who may wish us to undertake an activity that would be deemed illegal in any country," the report says.

The 25-page report was written by John Suffolk, a former British government chief information officer who became Huawei's global cyber security officer last year.

A Huawei spokesman said the report was not intended as a direct response to security concerns about the company in the United States, Australia and elsewhere.

"You could say that the information in the paper could be helpful in those countries where we've had challenges," said the spokesman, Scott Sykes. "It's not a specific response to those situations, but does it apply to those? Yes."

Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei issued a similar appeal for security cooperation in June in a rare public appearance at a Russian business conference. Ren made no mention of suspicions about Huawei but called on the global industry to "join hands" and warned security threats would continue to grow.

Huawei, based in Shenzhen, near Hong Kong, says its equipment is used by 45 of the world's 50 biggest phone companies. It has more than 110,000 employees and reported profit of 11.6 billion yuan (\$1.8 billion) last year on sales of 209.9 billion yuan (\$32.4 billion).

The company has tried to reassure foreign officials with steps that include setting up a testing center in Britain where government technicians can examine its equipment. But it has released few details about who controls Huawei, which has fueled suspicions abroad.

The company said it is working on security issues with groups such as the International Telecommunication Union; 3GPP, a global mobile standards body, and FIRST, a computer security group.

Huawei was barred from bidding to work on a planned Australian high-speed Internet network due to concerns about cyberattacks traced to China. The company had to unwind its purchase of a U.S. computer company, 3Leaf Systems, last year after it failed to win approval from a government security panel.

A U.S. congressional panel has said it will investigate whether allowing Huawei, rival ZTE Corp. and other Chinese makers of telecoms gear to expand in the United States might aid spying by Beijing.

Asked whether the Chinese government had asked Huawei to help spy abroad, Sykes said, "No, we deny that."

This week's report rejects as "inherently discriminatory" what it said is the notion that some technology suppliers can be trusted more than others based on their national origin. It noted that suppliers such as Ericsson and Alcatel-Lucent have extensive operations in China that serve foreign customers.

Huawei has long supplied mobile handsets to global phone carriers and is trying to develop its own a consumer brand, competing with Apple Inc. and Samsung Electronics Co. by marketing smart phones and other products under its own name.

This week, U.S. retailer RadioShack Corp. announced it will sell two Huawei phones as part of a new wireless venture.

Cambodia Arrests Pirate Bay Co-founder

A co-founder of popular file sharing website The Pirate Bay was arrested in Cambodia at the request of Sweden, where he faces a one-year prison term for violating copyright laws, authorities said Monday.

Cambodian authorities arrested Gottfrid Svartholm Warg on Thursday at a home he had rented in the capital, Phnom Penh, said national police spokesman Kirth Chantharith.

"He is being detained in Cambodia and we are waiting to expel him," Kirth Chantharith said. Cambodia has no extradition treaty with Sweden but has requested details of Svartholm Warg's crime in order to process his handover, he said, adding that Cambodia would act as quickly as possible.

Svartholm Warg and the site's three other founders were convicted in 2009 by a Swedish court of assisting copyright infringement by helping millions of the site's users to illegally download music, movies and computer games. All were sentenced to one year in prison and ordered to pay 30 million kronor (\$3.6 million) to entertainment companies, including Warner Bros., Sony Music Entertainment, EMI and Columbia Pictures.

Svartholm Warg failed to show up at an appeal hearing in 2010. At the time, his defense attorney told the court he had received text messages from Svartholm Warg's mother saying her son had fallen ill in Cambodia and would not appear in court.

The appeals court reduced the prison sentences for the three other co-founders from one year to between four and 10 months and raised the amount they have to pay in damages to the entertainment industry to 46 million kronor (\$6.5 million).

All four defendants denied the charges, arguing that The Pirate Bay doesn't actually host any copyright-protected material itself. Instead, it provides a forum for users to download content through so-called torrent files. The technology allows users to transfer parts of a large file from several different users, increasing download speeds.

Kirth Chantharith said a group of Swedish officials was scheduled to arrive in Cambodia on Monday or Tuesday to present documents concerning the case and discuss procedures for returning Svartholm Warg.

Insiders Suspected in Saudi Cyber Attack

One or more insiders with high-level access are suspected of assisting the hackers who damaged some 30,000 computers at Saudi Arabia's national oil company last month, sources familiar with the company's investigation say.

The attack using a computer virus known as Shamoon against Saudi Aramco - the world's biggest oil company - is one of the most destructive cyber strikes conducted against a single business.

Shamoon spread through the company's network and wiped computers' hard drives clean. Saudi Aramco says damage was limited to office computers and did not affect systems software that might hurt technical operations.

The hackers' apparent access to a mole, willing to take personal risk to help, is an extraordinary development in a country where open dissent is banned.

"It was someone who had inside knowledge and inside privileges within the company," said a source familiar with the ongoing forensic examination.

Hackers from a group called "The Cutting Sword of Justice" claimed responsibility for the attack. They say the computer virus gave them access to documents from Aramco's computers, and have threatened to

release secrets. No documents have so far been published.

Reports of similar attacks on other oil and gas firms in the Middle East, including in neighboring Qatar, suggest there may be similar activity elsewhere in the region, although the attacks have not been linked.

Saudi Aramco declined to comment. "Saudi Aramco doesn't comment on rumors and conjectures amidst an ongoing probe," it said.

The hacking group that claimed responsibility for the attack described its motives as political.

In a posting on an online bulletin board the day the files were wiped, the group said Saudi Aramco was the main source of income for the Saudi government, which it blamed for "crimes and atrocities" in several countries, including Syria and Bahrain.

The Saudi interior ministry did not respond to requests for comment. The foreign ministry was not available for comment.

Saudi Arabia sent troops into Bahrain last year to back the Gulf state's rulers, fellow Sunni Muslims, against Shi'ite-led protesters. Riyadh is also sympathetic to mainly Sunni rebels in Syria.

Saudi Arabia's economy is heavily dependent on oil. Oil export revenues have accounted for 80-90 percent of total Saudi revenues and above 40 percent of the country's gross domestic product, according to U.S. data.

Saudi Aramco, which supplies about a tenth of the world's oil, has hired at least six firms with expertise in hacking attacks, bringing in dozens of outside experts to investigate the attack and repair computers, the sources say.

According to analysis of Shamoon by computer security firm Symantec, the way the virus gets into networks may vary, but once inside it tries to infect every computer in the local area network before erasing files to render PCs useless.

"We don't normally see threats that are so destructive," Liam O Murchu, who helped lead Symantec's research into the virus, said. "It's probably been 10 years since we saw something so destructive."

The state-run oil company - whose 260 billion barrels of crude oil alone would value it at over 8 trillion dollars, or 14 times the market value of Apple Inc. - was well protected against break-in attempts over the Internet, according to people familiar with its network operations.

Yet those sources say such protections could not prevent an attack by an insider with high-level access.

It is unusual for insiders to be fingered in cyber attacks. Verizon Business, which publishes the most comprehensive annual survey of data breaches, said that insiders were implicated in just 4 percent of cases last year.

The hackers behind the Shamoon attack siphoned off data from a relatively small number of computers, delivering it to a remote server, the sources said. They later threatened to release that information.

Because the virus wiped the hard drives, it is difficult for Saudi Aramco

to determine exactly what information the hackers obtained.

An email address and password, which the poster claimed belonged to Aramco CEO Khalid Al-Falih, was posted on a website often used by hackers to show off their achievements, this time signed by the "Angry Internet Lovers". No sensitive Aramco files have been uploaded on that site.

Sources who spoke to Reuters said they were not aware whether the hackers had made specific demands, what they might have been or whether they were met.

The sources would not say whether the suspected mole or moles are Saudi Aramco employees or outside contractors, or whether they accessed a workstation inside Saudi Aramco's offices or accessed the network remotely.

The Saudi interior ministry was unavailable to comment on whether anyone has been arrested as part of the investigation.

The Shamoon virus is designed to attack ordinary business computers. It does not belong to the category of sophisticated cyber warfare tools - like the Stuxnet virus that attacked Iran's nuclear program in 2010 - which target industrial control systems and can paralyze critical infrastructure.

"Based on initial reporting and analysis of the malware, no evidence exists that Shamoon specifically targets industrial control systems components or U.S. government agencies," the Department of Homeland Security's United States Computer Emergency Readiness Team said in an August 29 advisory.

Saudi Aramco has said that only office PCs running Microsoft Windows were damaged. Its oil exploration, production, export, sales and database systems all remained intact as they ran on isolated and heavily protected systems.

"All our core operations continued smoothly," CEO Khalid Al-Falih told Saudi government and business officials at a security workshop on Wednesday.

"Not a single drop of oil was lost. No critical service or business transaction was directly impacted by the virus."

It is standard industry practice to shield plant operating networks from hackers by running them on separate operating systems that are protected from the Internet.

Qatar's natural gas firm Rasgas was also hit by a cyber attack last week, although it has not said how much damage was caused or whether Shamoon was the virus involved. Qatar, also a Sunni Gulf kingdom, has similar foes to Saudi Arabia.

Its parent firm Qatar Petroleum, which also owns Qatar's other main natural gas firm Qatargas, said it was unaffected but implied that other companies had been hit.

"Qatar Petroleum has not been affected by the computer virus that hit several oil and gas firms. All QP operations are continuing as normal," it said in an official tweet on Monday.

Security Startup CrowdStrike Hires One of FBI's Top Lawyers

A security firm known as CrowdStrike that is urging clients to get tough with hackers has hired one of the FBI's top attorneys to advise customers on just how far they can go in fighting back without getting into legal troubles of their own.

The firm said on Thursday that FBI Deputy Assistant Director Steven Chabinsky will join the company next week as senior vice president for legal affairs and chief risk officer.

CrowdStrike is among the most vocal proponents of a somewhat controversial new approach to dealing with hackers that is known as "offensive security" or "active defense" in security circles, through which victims strike back at attackers in cyberspace

The company's about 50 employees include a contingent of former intelligence and law enforcement officers, led by Shawn Henry, the former head of cyber crime investigations at the FBI who joined CrowdStrike in April as the president of its professional services division.

CrowdStrike will not discuss specific measures it employs, but say its methods are designed to frustrate adversaries by disrupting their infrastructures and misleading them with false information, which raises the time and money it takes for attackers to conduct their activities.

"We are in the early days of a cyber revolution where companies can choose to stop taking daily body blows from determined adversaries and take aggressive action to deter and create a hostile environment for the enemy inside," CrowdStrike Chief Executive George Kurtz said on his blog, www.georgekurtz.com.

"While there are no silver bullets, or miracle security programs that can fix all of the challenges we face, legal offensive security is the right way forward," he added.

He said that the company will introduce a beta version of its first technology product during the fourth quarter of this year.

"It's a big data platform to identify and prevent damage from targeted attacks," he said.

Company officials have to date said very little about the cloud-based technology, which has generated keen interest in the cyber security community as CrowdStrike has recruited some of the world's top computer scientists and other security experts from rival firms.

The company was set up late last year with funding from private equity firm Warburg Pincus.

CrowdStrike's founders are Kurtz, the former worldwide chief technology officer of McAfee; Dmitri Alperovitch, former vice president of threat research at McAfee; and Gregg Marston, who worked as chief financial officer of Foundstone Inc, a cyber security forensics firm that Kurtz sold to McAfee.

Swedish Websites Shut Down by Hacker Attacks

Swedish government websites were jammed by hackers for hours Monday, with some supporters of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange claiming responsibility on Twitter.

The websites of the Swedish government, Armed Forces and the Swedish Institute were among those experiencing problems.

Niklas Englund, head of digital media at the Swedish Armed Forces, said it was unclear who was behind the so-called denial-of-service attacks, in which websites are overwhelmed with bogus traffic.

But he noted that an unidentified group urging Sweden to take its "hands off Assange" claimed responsibility on Twitter.

Assange has been sheltering at Ecuador's Embassy in Britain since June 19 in an effort to avoid extradition to Sweden, where prosecutors want to question the founder of the secret-spilling WikiLeaks site over alleged sex crimes.

Microsoft Updates Privacy Policy To Match Google's

"Microsoft this week updated its services agreement with subtle, yet potentially significant changes to its policy on privacy and dispute settlement. The company notified users of the changes in an e-mail sent Friday, informing them that the new Terms of Service would go into effect on October 19th. Apparently taking its cue from Google, Microsoft's revised policy allows the company to access and display user content across all of its cloud properties." Microsoft said, when Google announced an identical policy change: "Google is in the midst of making some unpopular changes to some of their most popular products. Those changes, cloaked in language like 'transparency', 'simplicity', and 'consistency', are really about one thing: making it easier for Google to connect the dots between everything you search, send, say or stream while using one of their services." Let me guess: no outraged blog posts from the usual suspects this time around.

Romney's Taxes Hacked? Secret Service Is On It

The hackers who claim to have stolen Mitt Romney's tax returns - and are holding them to ransom for \$1 million in bitcoins - just became the targets of a Federal investigation.

As we mentioned earlier, the unidentified team of hackers described the theft on Pastebin. That's the same data-dump website where a treasure trove of one million Apple device IDs, allegedly taken from an FBI laptop, was found. The FBI later denied they'd been hacked.

The Romney hackers, by contrast, offered no proof -- just a description of an elaborate burglary inside PriceWaterhouseCooper's Tennessee office on August 25th, where they supposedly retrieved the tax returns that the GOP candidate has declined to release.

Romney's team was given until September 28th to transfer \$1 million in bitcoins (an untraceable online currency popular in the criminal underworld). Otherwise, the hackers said, the tax returns would either go to the highest bidder or be released on Pastebin for all to read.

Ironically, the largest bitcoin exchange - Bitfloor - halted trading Wednesday after being hit by hackers itself.

Whether or not the hackers are blowing smoke, attempted blackmail of a presidential candidate is a pretty serious offense. So the Secret Service is investigating, a spokesperson told CNET.

The agency, officially a department of the U.S. Treasury, investigates financial crimes alongside its more well-known role of protecting Presidents and candidates. So it couldn't be better placed to tackle this one.

Given that the tax return theft was described in such precise detail, it should be the work of a moment for agents to find out if it actually happened. Tracking down the hackers in question may take a little longer.

Will this help take the pressure off Romney, who has been under fire for not releasing as many tax returns as previous presidential candidates? Give us your take in the comments.

Amazon Takes On iPad With Larger Kindle Fire

Amazon unveiled four new Kindle Fire tablet computers on Thursday, including ones with larger color screens, as the online retailer steps up competition with Apple ahead of the holiday shopping season.

Amazon.com Inc. showed off the larger Kindle Fire with a high-definition display amid expectations that Apple Inc. will introduce a smaller iPad as early as next week.

The larger Fires will have screens that measure 8.9 inches diagonally, compared with 9.7 inches for the iPad. The original Fire had 7-inch screens. The basic version of the larger Fire will sell for \$299, or \$100 less than the cheapest iPad.

"It's very clear today that there are two names in the market for tablets. One is Amazon and one is Apple," said Carolina Milanesi, research vice president at Gartner.

Seven out of every 10 tablets sold in the second quarter were iPads, according to IHS iSuppli. Tablets using Google's Android operating system have not been able to carve out a significant stake. Amazon is trying to change that with the new Fires, which run a modified version of Android.

Amazon has been selling lower-priced tablets at thin, if any, profit margins to boost sales of digital items from its online store. As a result, it has been able to compete with the iPad on price.

CEO Jeff Bezos said in an interview backstage that Amazon won't lose money on the devices even if customers don't use them to buy digital content from its online store.

"We want people to buy content from the device, sure," he said. "We're fine if they don't."

The basic, 7-inch Fire model will cost \$159, down from \$199 for the original model, which sold out last month. Amazon says it is 40 percent faster, comes with twice the memory and has a longer battery life than the old version. It will start shipping next Friday.

"I want one," BGC Partners analyst Colin Gillis said about the \$159 Kindle Fire. "It's a great price, and it's certainly not something that's going to be making money for them initially. It's great for consumers. How great a business strategy (it is) for Amazon remains to be seen."

Amazon's bread-and-butter is not its Kindle gadgets but the movies, books and music that people consume through them. By contrast, Apple sees content sales as a sideline and wants to make a healthy profit on every device sold. For example, the cheapest iPad costs \$399 and the most recent models start at \$499.

But Amazon signaled Thursday that it is going head-to-head with Apple when it unveiled its high-end Kindle Fire HD. It will have two Wi-Fi channels and two internal antennas for faster, smoother transfers. That will be crucial for high-definition movies and other large files, Bezos told reporters.

The HD model will also have more storage, starting at 16 gigabytes (the same as the iPad), compared with 8 GB for the old Fire. About 2 GB is taken by the Fire's operating system.

An 8.9-inch model will go for \$299 and start shipping Nov. 20. That means a device nearly as big as the iPad will sell for at least \$100 less. A 7-inch HD model will sell for \$199, starting next Friday. Movies will play in 720p on the 7-inch model and 1080p on the larger one.

The Fire, however, won't have as extensive a selection of apps as the iPad. In addition, while the HD models will have a front-facing camera for video chats, the iPad has one on the rear as well for taking photos and video.

A premium Kindle Fire HD model, one with the ability to connect to the 4G cellular networks that phone companies are building, will cost \$499. It will come with 32 gigabytes of memory and an 8.9-inch screen. A data plan with AT&T will cost \$50 a year and come with a cap of 250 megabytes per month. Apple's 4G iPads with 32 GB cost \$729, not including data plans with AT&T or Verizon Wireless.

Baird analyst Colin Sebastian said Thursday's event showed that at the end of the day, Amazon is a "legitimate competitor in the tablet market."

"They did at least enough to compete against Apple and against Google this year," he said. That said, Sebastian added that he wouldn't worry about Apple.

"I'd worry about the other Android tablets," he said.

Google, for one, has a 7-inch Android tablet called the Nexus 7. Samsung Electronics Co., which outsold Apple in smartphones this year, also makes Android tablets under the Galaxy line. Barnes & Noble Inc. has the Nook Tablet, which also runs on a modified Android system.

Amazon also refreshed its line of stand-alone e-readers. Called Paperwhite, the new e-reader model has a black-and-white screen and comes with a light source.

Tablets such as the iPad and the Fire don't work as well in bright light because they are lit from the back. Bezos says the light on the Paperwhite is directed down at the display. The device promises eight weeks of battery life, even with the light on.

It costs \$119 and starts shipping Oct. 1. Amazon says it will start taking orders Thursday. There's also a model with 3G cellular connections for \$179. The Seattle-based retailer is also dropping the price of its low-end Kindle to \$69, from \$79. That will start shipping next Friday.

With the Paperwhite, Amazon "proved that there is still value in the uni-functional device," Gartner's Milanese said. But, she added, it has to be cheaper than the rest.

Can Twitter Ever Lose Its Cool?

If all the coolest people have left and the lamest people have joined, does that make Twitter officially over? Kaput? Done? That's what Vanity Fair's James Wolcott alleges in his musing on the state of the social media site's hipness. Wolcott recently joined the site and playing by Woody Allen rules, he reluctantly belongs to a club that will have him as a member. But deep down he knows that his acceptance says something about the club itself. "The fact that I joined Twitter may be evidence that it has peaked and a long valley beckons," he writes. He is a dad-age man who looks like this, so that is minorly compelling evidence. But he suggests it's not the only warning sign. He claims he is part of a trend, in which more uncool people are latching on to the service, as the cool kids leave, e.g., Ashton Kutcher out, Rupert Murdoch in. Again, convincing, but we're still not sure that indicates a total lost of hipness. To get an accurate reading on that, we will need to employ our very simple cool test: Was Twitter ever cool? And is it still cool?

1. Was it ever cool?

To have lost one's cool, a person, place or thing must have first had some to begin with. What makes something hip is the perfect balance between exclusivity and popularity, as we've learned with Greek yogurt and GIFs. That might sound contradictory, but it just means that the right people liked it and the wrong people didn't know about it. Or, even better: Were never invited to play along.

As for popularity, Twitter reached a critical mass in 2008, they say, when it had 752 percent growth. As this chart shows, people aren't leaving the site in droves, like what happened with MySpace. Nor has it experienced a growth slow down, like Facebook. Rather, it's numbers have been described as "booming" and "on a tear." People like it.

Now onto exclusivity. Unlike Spotify, which sent out special invites, Twitter never had a "digital velvet rope" and was always open to everyone, so that's a knock against it. There are "cool" people on it, like your Atlantic Wire staff members, celebrities, comedians, and some hipsters we know. Some of those people, like Ashton at just the right

moment of its popularity explosion, made it seem cool in a certain light. But at the same time, there were always conventional dorks on there, too. First of all, Barack Obama, a middle aged politician who wears dad jeans, has been on Twitter since 2007. And let us not forget all the media nerds. Michael Arrington, a tech blogger (definition of not cool) was one of the top media people to follow on the site in 2008. At no point in Twitter's trajectory did it have an exclusivity factor. For every Ashton there was always a Rupert.

Grade: Fail.

2. Is it still cool?

If it never had cool, it can't still be cool.

Grade: Fail.

So that's it. Twitter was never hip. It's popular with all sorts of people and always has been. If we were in the business of giving superlatives we would award it "most likely to succeed," not "cool kid" - those things are different. So, Wolcott, don't worry, some moms have been on the site for years and the only significant cool kid to leave is Ashton Kutcher, who looks more like a baby than too-cool-for-Twitter. So, as you say: "Let the good times scroll."

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